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Implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

Twenty-seventh semi-annual report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is the twenty-seventh semi-annual report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004). It provides a review and an assessment of the implementation of the resolution since the issuance of my previous report on the subject, on 16 October 2017 (S/2017/867), and covers developments up to 10 May 2018.

I. Implementation of resolution 1559 (2004)

2. Since the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004) by the Security Council on 2 September 2004, several of its provisions have been implemented, as highlighted in previous reports. However, a number of provisions, including with respect to the existence and activities of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, remain pending.

A. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon

3. Through the adoption of resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council sought to strengthen the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, in accordance with the Taif Accords of 1989, to which all the political parties in Lebanon had committed themselves. That objective has remained the priority of my efforts.

4. As previously indicated in my report of 8 March 2018 on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2018/210), on 4 November 2017 in Riyadh, the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri, announced his resignation. The President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, subsequently issued a statement that he would await the return of the Prime Minister to Lebanon to determine next steps, while underlining the importance of national unity. On 5 November, I issued a statement to express my concern about this development, hoping that all sides would focus their efforts on supporting the continuity of the State institutions of Lebanon, in adherence to the Constitution, and safeguarding the country's security and stability, and to reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to supporting the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. Following their meeting on 10 November with President Aoun, members of the International Support Group for Lebanon expressed

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their "continuing concern regarding the situation and prevailing uncertainty in Lebanon" and welcomed "the call of the President for Prime Minister Hariri to return to Lebanon".

5. As noted in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (ibid.), on 21 November, Prime Minister Hariri returned to Lebanon. The following day, he declared his decision to put his resignation on hold at the request of the President, "to allow further consultations about its political causes", and expressed his hope that that would allow for a renewed "commitment to the Taif Accords and the basics of national consensus and resolve the controversial issues and their impact on Lebanon's relations with its Arab brothers". On 5 December, the Council of Ministers of Lebanon issued a statement confirming its commitment to its ministerial statement of 28 December 2016, noting that Lebanon must be kept out of regional conflicts and the internal affairs of Arab countries, and reiterating its commitment to resolution 1701 (2006), the Taif Accords and the Charter of the League of Arab States. Subsequently, the Prime Minister withdrew his resignation.

6. On 8 December 2017, the International Support Group for Lebanon convened a high-level meeting in Paris. In a joint statement, the Group expressed its satisfaction at the return to Beirut of the Prime Minister, noting the decision of the Council of Ministers on disassociation from any regional conflicts and wars and from the internal affairs of Arab countries, and that it would "pay close attention to the implementation of the Council's decision by all Lebanese parties" and calling upon "all Lebanese parties to implement this tangible policy of disassociation from and non-interference in external conflicts, as an important priority, as spelled out in previous declarations, in particular the 2012 Baabda Declaration". The Group reiterated the need for the full implementation of and full respect for all Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Those messages were reinforced by the Security Council in a press statement of 19 December on the situation in Lebanon.

7. In his opening speech at the meeting of 8 December, Prime Minister Hariri emphasized his Government's commitment to the disassociation policy. He noted the unique nature of the government agreement on disassociation, stating that "all political parties agreed on the disassociation policy, and every political party [represented at] the Cabinet table is responsible about the disassociation. The guarantee is that this decision was taken unanimously". After a meeting held on 15 February 2018 with Rex Tillerson, then Secretary of State of the United States of America, President Aoun reportedly stated that "Lebanon is fully committed to the policy of self-dissociation and does not interfere in the internal affairs of States, but is not responsible for the interventions happening from outside".

8. At its December meeting, the International Support Group for Lebanon laid out an ambitious road map aimed at support for Lebanon, including a ministerial conference to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces, to be held in Rome (the "Rome II conference"), and an economic conference aimed at Lebanese development through reforms, to be held in Paris.

9. Marking critical progress towards the reactivation of Lebanese State institutions, the Government coordinated the holding of parliamentary elections on the basis of the electoral law adopted in June 2017. On 22 January 2018, President Aoun and Prime Minister Hariri signed a decree calling for parliamentary elections on 6 May, with out-of-country voting to be held on 27 and 29 April. Of the 597 candidates, 86 were women, representing 14.4 per cent. The electoral campaign period was reportedly marked by increased rhetoric along sectarian lines.

10. The voter turnout for the elections on 6 May was 49.2 per cent. At the time of reporting, preliminary results indicated a decrease in the representation of the Future Movement, an increase in that of the Lebanese Forces and a consolidation of the

presence of Hizbullah and the Amal Movement in Parliament. Among the 128 elected Members of Parliament, 6 are women. According to electoral observers from the European Union, "voting on election day was generally peaceful and the administration of polling efficient, with the presence of politically diverse candidate and list agents. Counting and tabulation were transparent. All European Union Election Observation Mission observers were able to observe the polling process without hindrance".

11. In a statement on 8 May, I congratulated Lebanon on the holding of parliamentary elections, the first to have taken place since 2009. I added that "the elections represent a vital step in strengthening Lebanon's State institutions and consolidating its democratic tradition" and that I was looking forward to the formation of the new Government. In a statement on 9 May, the Spokesperson of the European External Action Service stated that, as noted by the European Union observers, "the elections were well conducted and generally peaceful, which is a clear sign of the maturity of the Lebanese democratic institutions and the aspirations of the Lebanese people to overcome the persisting fragilities to achieve a democratic and united country", adding that increasing women's participation in politics would be an important element looking ahead. In a statement on 10 May, the International Support Group for Lebanon, meeting in Beirut, congratulated "the Lebanese people and authorities for the completion of parliamentary elections on 6 May ... in a generally calm and peaceful climate", encouraged "the swift formation of a new Government" and looked forward to "working with the new Government as it follows up on its international commitments, including under resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006)" and to "the resumption of a Lebanese-led dialogue towards a national defence strategy in the post-elections period".

12. The number of registered refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic hosted by Lebanon decreased slightly compared with the previous reporting period, totalling 986,942 as at 1 May 2018. On 1 February, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the United Nations launched the 2018 update of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, appealing for $2.68 billion to support 2.8 million people with humanitarian assistance, as well as investment in the country's public infrastructure, services and the local economy. At a conference entitled "Supporting the future of Syria and the region", held in Brussels on 24 and 25 April and co-chaired by the European Union and the United Nations, $4.4 billion was pledged for the Syria crisis response, including in Lebanon.

13. In its resolution 1680 (2006), the Security Council strongly encouraged the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to respond positively to the request made by the Government of Lebanon to delineate their common border. This remains critical to enable proper border control and management, including the movement of people and the potential movement of arms. While progress in that regard remains elusive, including as a result of the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, there has been some discernible improvement since the previous reporting period in the extension of the presence of the Lebanese State along the border with the Syrian Arab Republic, including through the construction of border observation posts of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

14. The delineation and demarcation of the boundaries of Lebanon remain elements essential to guaranteeing national sovereignty and territorial integrity. While border delineation is a bilateral matter, progress on that issue remains an obligation of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, in accordance with resolution 1680 (2006). On 14 December 2017, Lebanese and Syrian authorities, for the first time since 2012, reopened the Qa'-Jusiyah border crossing in north-eastern Lebanon, the only crossing of the five border crossings between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic that had been consistently closed owing to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

15. Cross-border violations of Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity continued on both the eastern and northern borders. Between October 2017 and March 2018, there were reports of two shooting incidents across the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, marking a significant decrease compared with previous reporting periods.

16. In violation of the sovereignty of Lebanon and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006), Israel continued to occupy the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line. By identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 13 April 2018, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations transmitted a letter from her country's Minister of National Defence in which the Minister noted, inter alia, "the ongoing occupation of the northern part of Ghajar town ... and Lebanese territory along the Blue Line".

17. There was no progress in relation to the issue of the Shab'a Farms area. Furthermore, neither the Syrian Arab Republic nor Israel has responded to the provisional definition of the area contained in my report of 30 October 2007 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2007/641). During a tour of Shab'a town in southern Lebanon on 13 April, Prime Minister Hariri said that "recovering the Shab'a Farms and the hills of Kfar Shuba is the responsibility of the State".

18. Unmanned aerial vehicles and fixed-wing aircraft, including fighter jets, of the Israel Defense Forces continued to make almost daily overflights of Lebanon during the reporting period, in violation of Lebanese sovereignty and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 30 October 2017, the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations stated that, on 7 September, four Israeli aircraft had violated Lebanese airspace before targeting Syrian territory, which he described as "a flagrant breach of Lebanese sovereignty". In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 8 February 2018 (A/72/742-S/2018/109), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations conveyed her Government's message that Israel had "once again violated Lebanese airspace ... in order to carry out raids in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic". In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 6 April 2018 (A/72/831-S/2018/336), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon conveyed her Government's message that "on 31 March 2018, Israel violated Lebanese airspace, using an unmanned aerial vehicle armed with four missiles. It subsequently sent a second aerial vehicle to bomb the first aerial vehicle and the site where the latter had crashed". In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 10 April 2018 (A/72/832-S/2018/342), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon conveyed her Government's message that "on 9 April 2018, four Israeli warplanes violated Lebanese airspace ... in order to conduct raids in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic", warning that "the repeated violation of its airspace by Israel to conduct raids in the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic poses a particular threat". In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 12 April 2018 (S/2018/345), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations alleged that "Lebanese violations of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) are daily occurrences".

19. As specified in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2018/210), pursuant to Security Council resolution 1757 (2007), I extended the mandate of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon from 1 March 2018 for a period of three years, or upon completion of the cases before the Special Tribunal if sooner.

B. Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory

20. The Government of Lebanon continued its efforts to extend the authority of the State throughout all Lebanese territory, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). Remaining at the forefront of such efforts were the Lebanese Armed Forces, including through its further deployment, and the Internal Security Forces. Yet, the endeavour continued to be challenged.

21. In its statement of 8 December, the International Support Group for Lebanon commended "the role played by the Lebanese Armed Forces and by all State security institutions in protecting the country, its borders and its population". It recalled that the Lebanese Armed Forces were "the only legitimate armed forces of Lebanon, as enshrined in the Lebanese constitution and the Taif agreement". It called upon the international community "to continue, coordinate and step up its support to these institutions" and, in that context, welcomed "the holding of the Rome II meeting to be hosted by Italy."

22. As part of the efforts by the international community to support Lebanese institutions and contribute to the expansion of State authority, the Rome II conference was held in Rome on 15 March 2018 under the auspices of the International Support Group for Lebanon and under the chairmanship of the United Nations and Italy, gathering together the representatives of 40 countries and organizations. At the conference, Prime Minister Hariri emphasized the need to build State security institutions as "the sole defenders of Lebanon's sovereignty".

23. Participants in the conference "endorsed the Lebanese Government's vision of the Lebanese Armed Forces as the sole defender of the Lebanese State and protector of its borders, and of the Internal Security Forces as a key instrument in building the monopoly of the use of force by the Lebanese State".

24. In addition, conference participants "recalled relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), including provisions that there be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State, no foreign forces in Lebanon without the consent of its Government, and no sale or supply of arms-related materiel to Lebanon except as authorized by its Government". Participants welcomed the updated capability development plan of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the strategic plan of the Internal Security Forces. The Security Council reiterated those messages in a press statement issued on 27 March 2018. Participants in the Rome conference also made pledges of financial support for the security institutions.

25. The Lebanese Armed Forces continued to undertake efforts to maintain the country's stability. On 10 November 2017, five soldiers were injured when a patrol from the Lebanese Armed Forces came under intense gunfire during an exchange with armed men in the area of Dar al-Wasi'ah, in Baalbek. Army units reportedly conducted raids in the area that resulted in the seizure of several weapons, ammunition, bombs and drugs. On 4 January 2018, according to a statement from the Directorate of Orientation of the Lebanese Armed Forces, during an operation to arrest one of the alleged perpetrators of the attacks against the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces in Arsal in 2017, the Lebanese Armed Forces were attacked by gunmen, which led to the wounding of one soldier and caused damage to two military vehicles. On 5 February, in an overnight operation to arrest a wanted suspect in Tripoli, a Lebanese soldier was killed and a number of others injured. The wanted individual was also killed.

26. Arrests of individuals on charges of terrorism, including belonging to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, most of which were related to the battle of Arsal in July 2017, continued during the reporting period.

C. Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias

27. In its resolution 1559 (2004), the Security Council called for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, a key provision of the resolution that has yet to be implemented. The provision reflects and reaffirms a decision to which all Lebanese committed themselves in the Taif Accords. It is critical that the Accords be preserved and implemented by all in order to avoid the spectre of a renewed confrontation among Lebanese citizens and to strengthen the institutions of the State. The Lebanese State should increase its efforts to achieve a monopoly on the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout its territory.

28. Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias within the country continued to operate outside the control of the Government, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004). While several groups across the political spectrum in Lebanon possess weapons outside government control, Hizbullah is the most heavily armed militia in the country. In a democratic State, it remains a fundamental anomaly that a political party maintains a militia that has no accountability to the democratic, governmental institutions of the State but has the power to take that State to war. The maintenance of arms by Hizbullah and other groups and the alleged increase by Hizbullah of its arsenal pose a serious challenge to the State's ability to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. In addition, several Palestinian armed groups continued to operate in the country, inside and outside the Palestine refugee camps.

29. There has been no tangible progress towards the disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias, as called for in the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). Since the adoption of that resolution, no specific steps have been taken to tackle that crucial issue, which lies at the heart of the sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon. The maintenance by Hizbullah of a military arsenal outside of a legal framework and its involvement in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to be denounced by a number of voices in Lebanon, who consider those issues to be destabilizing factors in the country and ones that undermine democracy. Many Lebanese see the continued presence of such arms as an implicit threat that the weapons could be used within Lebanon for political reasons.

30. As included in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (ibid.), in early December 2017, video footage emerged of Qais al-Khazali, of the Iraqi Shi'te militia Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, visiting South Lebanon in military uniform in the company of Hizbullah representatives. On 9 December, Prime Minister Hariri issued a statement asserting that he had contacted military and security officials to investigate and to take measures to prevent any person from carrying out military activities and prevent Qais al-Khazali's re-entry into Lebanon. In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 12 December 2017 (S/2017/1043), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations stated that that visit constituted a violation of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004). On 15 January 2018, an arrest warrant was issued in Lebanon for Qais al-Khazali. On 26 December 2017, a photograph appeared on social media in which Haj Hamza (Abu al-Abbas), the commander of an Aleppo-based pro-Syrian government militia, Imam al-Baqir Brigade, appeared to be standing near the Blue Line, as specified in my report on resolution 1701 (2006).

31. In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 5 February 2018 (S/2018/91), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations stated that a senior Iranian official, Ebrahim Raisi, had visited the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon close to the Blue Line on 28 January and had been accompanied by "uniformed and armed members of Hizbullah". The Permanent Representative also stated that, prior to his visit to the Blue Line, "Raisi ... called for strengthening the 'axis of resistance' — Iran, Lebanon, and other forces" against Israel. Responding to that letter, the Minister of National Defence of Lebanon, in the above-mentioned letter dated 13 April 2018, stated that Mr. Raisi had been accompanied by a Hizbullah member of Parliament and that "his escort was not visibly carrying weapons".

32. In identical letters addressed to me and the President of the Security Council dated 28 November 2017 (S/2017/1000), the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations expressed concern at what he said was a statement by the Commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Major General Mohamed Ali Jaafari, which he said expressed "Iran's intentions and actions taken to continue arming Hizbullah". In response, in a letter addressed to me dated 5 December 2017 (S/2017/1019), the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations accused Israel of making "false and baseless accusations".

33. During the reporting period, the Government of Lebanon recommitted to making progress on the development of a national defence strategy, including through statements by representatives at the highest levels. On 6 December 2017, in a statement, President Aoun's office said that, "through dialogue between the Lebanese on various issues of concern, especially the defence strategy, we can achieve common grounds that promote stability and fortify unity". In its statement of 8 December, the International Support Group for Lebanon called on all Lebanese parties to resume discussions towards a consensus on a national defence strategy and welcomed the statement of the President of Lebanon in that regard. On 8 May 2018, in a televised address to the nation after the parliamentary elections, President Aoun reportedly stated that he would be calling for parties to sit down and discuss the implementation of the Taif Accords and a national defence strategy.

34. Ahead of the Rome II conference, President Aoun, on 12 March 2018, emphasized the importance of providing the Lebanese Armed Forces with qualitative weapons "to enable it to play its role through the national defence strategy, which will be discussed by Lebanese leaders after the parliamentary elections in May that will result in a new Government". In his speech at the opening session of the conference, Prime Minister Hariri referred to President Aoun's commitment to discuss the national defence strategy following the May elections. He also joined the President's call to the international community to support the Lebanese Armed Forces, "to enable them to assume their duty of preserving security and stability in accordance with the national defence strategy". Conference participants called on all Lebanese parties to resume discussions towards a consensus on a national defence strategy and welcomed the President's statement of 12 March in that regard. That message was reiterated by the Security Council in its above-mentioned press statement of 27 March.

35. In a televised speech on 21 March, Hizbullah's secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, expressed his party's openness to discussing a national defence strategy, recalling that Hizbullah had presented its vision during the national dialogue of 2006. In the same speech, he expressed Hizbullah's support for the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces, emphasizing, however, the importance of giving them "arms to protect from the Israeli threats and attacks".

36. The participation of Hizbullah and other Lebanese in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continued to breach the policy of disassociation and the principles of the Baabda Declaration.

37. The security situation in Palestine refugee camps remained mostly stable, but relatively tense. On 7 December 2017, in the camps of Beddawi, Nahr el-Bared, Ein El-Helweh and Mieh Mieh, Palestine refugees, through sit-ins and peaceful strikes, protested the decision made by the United States on 6 December to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. On 18 March 2018, thousands of Palestine refugees reportedly took part in a Hamas-sponsored event in Sidon marking 100 days since that decision. In a speech made on 11 December 2017 at a rally to protest the United States decision, Hizbullah's secretary-general Nasrallah called for the "unification of all resistance ... factions in the region" through the setting-up of a unified strategy for confrontation, pledging that Hizbullah would live up to its responsibilities in that regard.

38. Separately, in early March 2018, a string of seemingly unrelated incidents occurred in the refugee camps of Rashidieh and Shatila, apparently as the result of personal disputes that had turned into factional fighting. On 4 March, a personal dispute between a Syrian and a Palestine refugee reportedly erupted in the Rashidieh camp and escalated into a shoot-out involving members of the Islamist group Jund Ansar Allah, resulting in the killing of two individuals and the setting ablaze of a number of homes and shops. On 7 March, clashes involving machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades reportedly erupted between the Fatah al-Intifada and al-Sa'iqa groups at the Shatila refugee camp, killing one person and wounding two others. A suspect was reportedly arrested by the Lebanese Armed Forces shortly after the clashes. On 17 March, the killing of a member of Fatah in the Mieh Mieh refugee camp reportedly resulted in armed clashes between Fatah members and the camp's security forces, as well as in high tensions across the camps.

39. The situation in Ein El-Helweh was marked by a relative lull during the reporting period, including as tensions between Fatah and Islamist factions notably decreased. On 28 October 2017, the General Director of the General Directorate of General Security, Major General Abbas Ibrahim, reportedly informed the media of the departure from Ein El-Helweh to the Syrian Arab Republic of the Islamist militant Shadi al-Mawlawi, who had been involved in clashes in Tripoli, including against the Lebanese Armed Forces, in 2014. According to information reportedly released by Bilal Badr on social media on 2 January 2018, the latter left Ein El-Helweh and settled in the Syrian Arab Republic. On 9 February, armed clashes in the camp between Fatah and members of an Islamist armed group reportedly left three injured. On 4 April, two people were killed and three others wounded in a gunfight between two members of Islamist factions in Ein El-Helweh. During the reporting period, three individuals wanted by the Lebanese authorities turned themselves in and one was handed over by the joint Palestinian security forces. Four individuals, including a 17-year-old, from Ein El-Helweh were arrested on terrorism-related charges.

40. The ability of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to deliver its essential health, education, relief and social services has been challenged, including following the announcement by the United States on 17 January 2018 of its decision to reduce its funding to the Agency. On 15 March, Egypt, Jordan and Sweden co-chaired an extraordinary ministerial conference in Rome entitled "Preserving dignity and sharing responsibility — mobilizing collective action for UNRWA", which I attended. As of May 2018, the overall shortfall in the Agency's budget had been reduced to less than $246 million.

41. The presence of Palestinian armed groups outside the camps also continued. Notwithstanding the decision taken in 2006 in the context of the national dialogue,

and confirmed at subsequent sessions, to disarm Palestinian militias outside the camps within a six-month period, no progress was made during the reporting period with regard to dismantling the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada in the country.

42. On 14 January 2018, the Hamas official Mohammad Hamdan was reportedly wounded in the suspected explosion of an improvised explosive device that targeted his car in Sidon. A statement reportedly issued by the Hamas media bureau claimed that "preliminary investigations seemed to point to Israel's responsibility for the attack". Following an investigation by the Lebanese authorities and the arrest of one of the alleged perpetrators, the Lebanese Ministry of Interior and Municipalities announced on 26 January that the suspect had admitted to the attack and claimed to have been directed by Israeli intelligence agencies. Israel has firmly denied any involvement in the attack.

II. Observations

43. Lebanon recently witnessed several tumultuous months, during which Lebanese leaders came to the fore to confront existing challenges in a united fashion. The international conferences held in support of Lebanon are a testament to the importance that members of the international community attach to preserving the stability of Lebanon in a region in turmoil. The conferences also demonstrated the sustained efforts that international players and Lebanese leaders have made to reinforce institutions of the State, in particular its legitimate security forces.

44. The emphasis on the disassociation policy has been at the forefront of the international community's message in its efforts to maintain the stability of Lebanon. Respect for the disassociation policy and the Baabda Declaration of 2012 is necessary to prevent Lebanon from becoming embroiled in conflicts in the region. I note the renewed commitment to the disassociation policy expressed unanimously by the Lebanese Cabinet, as well as by President Aoun and Prime Minister Hariri. I echo and support the Prime Minister's message that every party is responsible for the implementation of the disassociation policy. I join my voice with those of other international actors in their repeated calls for tangible implementation of the disassociation policy without delay.

45. I have already noted, in my report on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2018/210), that unauthorized visits by foreign militia members to South Lebanon undermine the authority of the State and run counter to the spirit of disassociation.

46. The widespread presence of weapons outside the control of the State, combined with the existence of heavily armed militias, undermines the security of Lebanese citizens. The maintenance by Hizbullah of sizeable and sophisticated military capabilities outside the control of the Government of Lebanon remains a matter of grave concern. I reiterate my calls for all concerned to contribute to efforts to reinforce the institutions of the Lebanese State. I also reiterate my call for Hizbullah and all other parties concerned not to engage in any military activity inside or outside Lebanon, consistent with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004). I continue to urge the Government and the armed forces of Lebanon to take all measures necessary to prohibit Hizbullah and other armed groups from acquiring weapons and building paramilitary capacity outside the authority of the State, in violation of resolution 1559 (2004).

47. Hizbullah's engagement in the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic is in breach of the disassociation policy and the principles of the Baabda Declaration of 2012. The

involvement of Hizbullah in the Syrian Arab Republic for several years demonstrates the failure of Hizbullah to disarm and its refusal to be accountable to the State institutions that the implementation of resolution 1559 (2004) was intended to strengthen.

48. I also continue to be concerned by the reported involvement of Hizbullah, as well as that of other Lebanese elements, in fighting elsewhere in the region, which carries the risk of entangling Lebanon in the regional conflicts and poses risks to the stability of Lebanon and of the region. Such activities challenge the prospect of the full implementation of resolution 1559 (2004). I call upon countries in the region that maintain close ties with Hizbullah to encourage the transformation of that armed group into a solely civilian political party, and its disarmament, in accordance with the requirements of the Taif Accords and resolution 1559 (2004), in the best interests of Lebanon and of regional peace and security.

49. I congratulate Lebanon on the holding of parliamentary elections on 6 May, which represents a vital step in strengthening its State institutions and consolidating its democratic tradition. In particular, the renewal of the country's Parliament through elections for the first time in almost 10 years is necessary for Lebanese citizens to feel adequately represented. I urge all members of Parliament, once they are in office, to ensure efficient political decision-making on issues affecting the everyday lives of citizens and to further the normalization of the country's institutional functioning. As I have stated, I look forward to the expeditious formation of the new Government and call on the political leaders of Lebanon to work in a spirit of unity and with a view to furthering the ambitious agenda set out by the country and its international partners.

50. I welcome the efforts of Lebanon to develop and modernize its security institutions, including through the development of strategic plans defining its vision and its resource needs. I echo the endorsement by the International Support Group for Lebanon of the Government's vision of the Lebanese Armed Forces as the sole defender of the Lebanese State and protector of its borders, and that of the Internal Security Forces as a key instrument in building the monopoly of the use of force by the State. I welcome the pledges made to financially and technically support the implementation of these plans, and call on partners to further enhance their support in order to respond to the needs outlined by the Government of Lebanon. I renew the call of the participants for Lebanon to fully implement all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1559 (2004).

51. I welcome President Aoun's commitment on 12 March to develop a national defence strategy after the parliamentary elections. I am encouraged by the President's confidence that common ground in that regard can be achieved through dialogue, and I reaffirm the readiness of the United Nations to support that process. I heed the call of the participants in the International Support Group for Lebanon for all Lebanese parties to resume discussions on a national defence strategy, and I look forward to early tangible steps in that regard. Now is the time for Lebanon to resume the national dialogue as a Lebanese-owned, Lebanese-led process, in line with the country's international obligations. It is important that such a strategy address the need to achieve a State monopoly over the possession and use of weapons and the use of force. I encourage President Aoun to continue to demonstrate leadership in steering forward that effort, and I call on all political leaders to support it.

52. I remain concerned that the financial pressure being exerted on UNRWA could hinder its ability to deliver its essential health, educational, social and relief services to highly vulnerable Palestine refugees. UNRWA services, in many cases, are lifesaving for the population it serves. Their discontinuation would have drastic consequences, both for the people who benefit from such services and for the overall stability in the Palestine refugee camps and the region. I am grateful to those Member

States that have advanced their annual commitments and that made pledges at the Rome extraordinary ministerial conference to enable UNRWA to continue operations in the near term, and I look forward to significant additional financial support. Such efforts are without prejudice to the eventual resolution of the Palestine refugee question in the context of a comprehensive settlement in the region.

53. The continued political and socioeconomic fragility in the Palestine refugee camps is an environment conducive to the degeneration of personal disputes into factional fighting, which at times results in casualties. I renew my call for the Government to implement earlier decisions made in the context of the national dialogue in 2006 pertaining to the disarmament of Palestinian militias, as called for in the document entitled "A unified Lebanese vision for the Palestinian refugees affairs in Lebanon", the implementation of which I encourage.

54. Lebanon continues to face on its own soil the political, security, humanitarian and social impacts of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. I welcome the continuous generosity of Lebanon in responding to the crisis. I urge donors to offer concrete support to Lebanon in its response to the crisis.

55. I condemn all violations of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon. They also undermine the credibility of the Lebanese security services and generate anxiety among the civilian population. I renew my calls for Israel to adhere to its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions and to withdraw its forces from the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, as well as to immediately cease its overflights of Lebanese airspace.

56. The decrease in the number of incidents of shooting, shelling, air strikes, rocket attacks and incursions from the Syrian Arab Republic is noteworthy. I note, however, that no progress has been made by the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon in the delineation of their common border, which is critical to enable proper border control and management, including the movement of people and the potential movement of arms. I call upon all concerned to cease violations of the border and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

57. Lebanon has received high-level attention from the international community on the political, economic and security fronts over the past few months. The onus is now on the country to demonstrate meaningful progress on key policy issues of relevance to resolution 1559 (2004), including the tangible implementation of the disassociation policy and the resumption of a dialogue on a national defence strategy. I therefore count on the continued commitment of the Government of Lebanon to its international obligations, and I call upon all parties and actors to fully abide by resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). The United Nations will continue its efforts towards the full implementation of those and all other resolutions pertaining to Lebanon.